

SHAILOS L'CHAZARA

Review Questions

Likkutei Sichos Vol. 1

לקוטי שיחות · חלק א

Parshas Ki Sisa

פרשת כי תשא

2 sichas in this booklet

Sicha 1: A Coin of Fire! · p. 178, §§1-10

Sicha 2: Stop Limping Between Two Opinions! · p. 183, §§11-17

TEACHER'S EDITION

Answers are printed in italics on the answer lines, with the section (§) of the sicha.

★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

Each sicha has questions, a true chassidishe story, and a lesson for you.

A Coin of Fire!

זה יתנו

Likkutei Sichos vol. 1, Parshas Ki Sisa, p. 178ff, sections 1-10. From a sicha of Shabbos Parshas Shekalim 5717 (1957).

The point: *Moshe couldn't see how money could be a "ransom for the soul", so Hashem showed him a coin of fire from under the Kisei HaKavod. A coin has the same value for everyone (shov, kabbalas ol); fire rises (ratzo, excitement); the Kisei HaKavod is Hashem covering His light so creatures can receive it. The goal is a "coin of fire": kabbalas ol with fire, which comes from the essence of the soul, which stays whole even in sin, and so it atones. That explains the halachos of the half shekel. Today it is tzedakah before davening: giving your hard-earned "fire" with kabbalas ol, and warmly.*

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

- ★ What does the Yerushalmi say about "zeh yitnu"?

Hashem took out a kind of coin of fire from under the Kisei HaKavod, showed it to Moshe and said:

"like this they shall give", because Moshe found the half shekel hard. (§1)

- ★★ According to Tosafos, what was hard for Moshe? What question remains?

Not what the coin looked like, but how there can be a "ransom for the soul", since "all that a man

has he will give for his soul". So how did a coin of fire from under the Kisei HaKavod answer

that? (§1)

- ★★ What is the difference between a coin and goods worth money?

People value goods differently: one who needs it more values it more, another less, a third not at

all. A coin has a fixed value, the same for everyone ("it is accepted everywhere"). (§2)

- ★★ How is fire different from the other elements?

The other elements are heavy and go down, and even wind stays down below. Fire by nature rises, so

you need tricks to hold it down so it can give light. (§2)

5. ★★★ How can “kisei” (covering) and “kavod” (honor, which comes from revelation) go together?

The Maggid: if the full brightness Above shone, creatures couldn't take it in. So there is a cover that hides only the light too high for them, and through that a light suited to them is revealed, which brings them to honor Hashem. A seat also means lowering oneself: Hashem lowers Himself to creatures. The letters too: “kes Alef”, the Alufo shel olam covering Himself. It is the first revelation of the Ein Sof in creatures. (§2)

6. ★★ What two feelings does the Kisei HaKavod awaken?

Ratzo: sensing G-dliness beyond their mind and heart awakens a longing to break out of limits (what is completely beyond them they can't even sense). Shov: knowing that Hashem wants a dwelling below, and hid Himself in order to come down, leads to kabbalas ol, Torah and mitzvos here in this world. (§3)

7. ★★ How are fire and coin ratzo and shov? Why is shov equal for all?

Fire rises: ratzo. A coin is the same for everyone: shov. Ratzo comes from a person's own feeling, so it differs by level; shov comes from kabbalas ol, wanting to do Hashem's will, so it is equal for all. “Matbe'a” is also from “teva”, nature: its value doesn't depend on anyone's feelings. (§4)

8. ★★★ What is the goal of a “coin of fire”, and where does it come from?

Normally people do with life and excitement what they understand and feel, and do kabbalas ol things without excitement. The goal is both together: kabbalas ol with fire, excitement about what Hashem wants, not about what I want. A creature can't join opposites; it comes from G-dliness (“bearer of opposites”), from under the Kisei HaKavod, which in a Jew is the essence of the soul, hewn from under the Kisei HaKavod, “a small spark of the Creator”. (§§5–6)

9. ★★ How does this answer Moshe's question?

Sins, even the eigel, damage only the "revealed" powers; the essence of the soul is always whole ("even while sinning it remained faithful to Him"). A coin of fire, ratzo and shov together, coming from the essence, affects the revealed powers too: kaparah means wiping clean, so all the damage goes away, and he is even "as desired as before the sin". (§7)

10. ★★ Explain the halachos: the rich don't add, only coins, only korbanos tzibbur, only the adanim.

Rich and poor differ only in revealed powers; in the essence all are equal ("one Father to all"). Avodah from the essence must be "silver", a coin equal for all, not goods. Korbanos tzibbur come from all Israel as one complete body, unlike a korban yachid, where a rich man must bring a rich man's offering. Only the adanim, the foundation, meaning kabbalas ol; the curtains and beams were "as each heart desired", tied to the revealed powers. (§8)

11. ★★ What takes the place of the half shekel today, and why before davening?

Tzedakah: "he gave a coin to a poor man, and then davened." Tefillah was set in place of the temidin, which were korbanos tzibbur; and tefillah is the foundation of the day's avodah, involving the whole person, just as tzedakah involves "all his life-force". (§9)

12. ★★★ How is tzedakah a "coin of fire"?

Money is "fire": a person worked hard for it, and it could buy "his very life", so he is attached to it with life and excitement. Giving it to a poor man "who has nothing of his own" has no reason except kabbalas ol. And the kabbalas ol itself comes with feeling: one must comfort him (mefayso). So it is a "ransom for the soul": "redeem your sins with tzedakah", even the eigel, until "I will see Your face", the Shechinah dwelling in each Jew. (§10)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

Forty-Three Rubles

When Rabbi Zvi Elimelech of Dinov, later known as the Bnei Yissaschar, was ten years old, his father took a job as a teacher in a distant town and spent the winter at a Jewish-owned inn.

That winter was bitter. During a week-long snowstorm, three half-frozen Polish peasants knocked at the door. Together they didn't have enough for even one night, so the innkeeper shut the door on them. The shocked teacher protested. "Do you want to pay for them?" the innkeeper shrugged. To his surprise, the teacher agreed. The storm went on, and the peasants stayed two weeks at his expense.

Before Pesach the teacher came to settle up. The innkeeper owed him 40 rubles for teaching his children; the teacher owed 43 for the peasants. "Bring the three rubles after Yom Tov," said the innkeeper.

The teacher couldn't bring himself to go home empty-handed, so he sat in shul learning. His son found him and begged him to come see the new Pesach clothes his mother had bought, on credit.

On the way home a coach rattled past, and a parcel fell off the back. The father ran after it but couldn't catch it; the bag had no marks, so by halachah he could keep it. Inside were exactly 43 rubles.

At the Seder, when young Zvi Elimelech opened the door for Eliyahu HaNavi, he called out: "Father, the coachman is here!" But no one was there.

Source: Hershel Finman, "Forty-Three Rubles" (chabad.org), told by a disciple of the Bnei Yissaschar

Think: How was the teacher's giving a "coin of fire" (§10)?

He gave his hard-earned wages, his "fire", to strangers who had no claim on him, purely because it was right: kabbalas ol, the poor who "have nothing of their own". And he gave warmly, insisting they be taken in out of the cold.

THE LESSON FOR YOU

Do the kabbalas ol things with fire. Give tzedakah before davening, from money you worked for, and give warmly.

For example: You drop a coin in the pushka half-asleep. Tomorrow, put in a coin from your babysitting money before Hodu, and give the collector at the door a warm "Good morning!" with it.

Stop Limping Between Two Opinions!

עד מתי אתם פוסחים על שתי הסעיפים

Likkutei Sichos vol. 1, Parshas Ki Sisa, p. 183ff, sections 11–17. From a sicha of Shabbos Parshas Ki Sisa 5717 (1957).

The point: *Eliyahu asked, "How long will you limp between two opinions?" and not "how long will you serve Baal?" Avodah zarah began with honoring the stars for the blessings that pass through them: worship for self-interest. Limping (doubt, or believing in Hashem and also something else) is in many ways worse: it's harder to do real teshuvah, it shows spirituality doesn't matter to him, and a believer who does it leads many astray. Today it looks like putting the Shulchan Aruch on the shelf "just for now" for parnassah, honor or "what will people say". The call: do teshuvah, "double", and say together "Hashem hu haElokim".*

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

- ★ What did Eliyahu say on Har HaCarmel? What is the question?

He gathered the prophets of Baal and all Israel and said: "How long will you limp between two opinions?" Why not "how long will you serve the Baal", and declare "Hashem hu haElokim"? (§11)

- ★★ How could Jews, believers and children of believers, serve avodah zarah?

The Rambam: it began because Hashem's flow passes through the stars, so people honored them to get it. The truth is they are only "an axe in the hand of the chopper". (Unlike parents, who have free choice and whom we must honor.) (§§11–12)

- ★★ So what is the root of avodah zarah?

It was for physical benefits, self-interest, which is why even believing Jews could stumble: it isn't real worship, just self-interest. A Jew serves Hashem not to get anything, but because he is truly devoted. Of the Baal they said: "since we stopped... we lacked everything." (§12)

- ★★ What are the two kinds, avodah zarah and "limping"?

Avodah zarah: he really thinks it brings blessing. Limping: out of doubt, or shituf, believing in Hashem and also, lehavdil, in avodah zarah. Even shituf, doubt, or only words or only actions with no belief at all, is so serious that a Jew gives his life rather than do it (Tanya ch. 19). (§13)

5. ★★★ Why is the one who limps worse when it comes to teshuvah? Give two reasons.

(1) The idolater, once he sees the truth, feels how terrible his sin was and does real teshuvah; the limper always believed in Hashem too, so he thinks "what's so terrible?", and his teshuvah isn't complete. (2) To the idolater spirituality matters, he was just wrong; the limper shows spirituality means nothing to him, since he trades Hashem for gashmiyus while knowing the truth ("leaving the spring of living water for broken cisterns"), so even when he sees that gashmiyus depends on Hashem, he returns only for gashmiyus. (§14)

6. ★★ In what way is he worse regarding others?

No Jew learns from a known idolater; but the limper is a believer, so he leads many astray, and "one who causes the many to sin is worst of all". (§15)

7. ★★ Is this still relevant today?

The Gemara says the yetzer hara for avodah zarah was nullified, but "limping" is still strong, in subtle forms or more. (§16)

8. ★★ What does "limping" look like today?

For parnassah, imagined honor, or "what will people say", some give up parts of Torah and mitzvos "for now": for days or weeks they put the Shulchan Aruch, together with Hashem, on the shelf, so no one calls them a batlan who doesn't understand the new times, "in America you have to give up the old ways". (§16)

9. ★★ What happens to the extra money earned that way?

It gets spent on doctors and the like: since it came against Hashem's will, it goes to bad things, without the brachah "Hashem will bless you... and guard you from harm". (§16)

10. ★★★ Why is it in many ways worse than avodah zarah? Give three reasons.

(1) Real teshuvah is hard, since he fools himself that it isn't so bad: he is generally observant, so what's wrong with a temporary compromise for parnassah? (2) He is corrupt: he trades eternal spiritual things for temporary physical ones, selling Olam Haba for money and honor. (3) He causes many to sin: open heresy would be thrown out, but he dresses up what's against the Torah as "no harm for now", even with "proofs" from pesukim and Chazal. (§16)

11. ★★ What is the call of the haftorah for us?

Then all Israel did teshuvah and said twice "Hashem hu haElokim", more than at Matan Torah ("Anochi" once), because teshuvah reaches higher, "double", not just in amount but in level. So too now, all who limp must return. And since "all Jews are responsible for each other", the light reaches those they led astray, and all together will say: "Hashem hu haElokim, Hashem hu haElokim!" (§17)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

Shabbos or the Game?

Reuben Bezaquen had spent fifteen years working toward professional baseball. He had been keeping Shabbos for five months and kosher for four when his team's first away game of the season fell on Shabbos. He felt backed into a corner. "I wanted to believe that I could have it all," he wrote, "that I could hold onto professional baseball and my faith without losing either." He went and played.

During the game a ball slammed into his mitt and pain shot up his arm; his wrist was badly hurt. On the bus home he opened his siddur, though he barely knew where to look, and tears came. "Please, G-d," he begged, "I'll never play on Shabbos again."

At the dinner stop the coach was paying, as always, and nothing was kosher. Before he knew it, he had ordered a grilled chicken sandwich. Then he sat facing it for more than ten minutes. "What am I doing? This isn't right." Finally he pushed the tray to his teammate: "All yours."

His baseball season was over. At first he thought Hashem was punishing him. Later he saw it differently: "It wasn't punishment, but guidance towards a decision I didn't yet have the strength to make on my own." A year later he wrote: all 52 Shabbosos had come and gone, and he hadn't missed a single one.

Source: Reuben Bezaquen, "The Day I Chose Shabbat and Kosher Over My Baseball Career" (chabad.org)

Think: How was Reuben "limping between two opinions" (§§13, 16)? What made his teshuvah real?

He believed and kept Shabbos, yet put it on the shelf "just this once" for his career and team,

hoping to "have it all". His teshuvah was real because he felt how wrong it was (he couldn't eat

the sandwich) and made a firm decision: not one Shabbos missed since.

THE LESSON FOR YOU

Don't "limp": no Shulchan Aruch on the shelf "just for now" because of friends, honor or what people say. Be the same Yid everywhere.

For example: At a friend's party everyone orders from a pizza place that isn't kosher, and you'll look "weird". Bring your own, and say proudly why.